

FREMONT, JOHN CHARLES

DRAWER 106

CONTEMPORARIES

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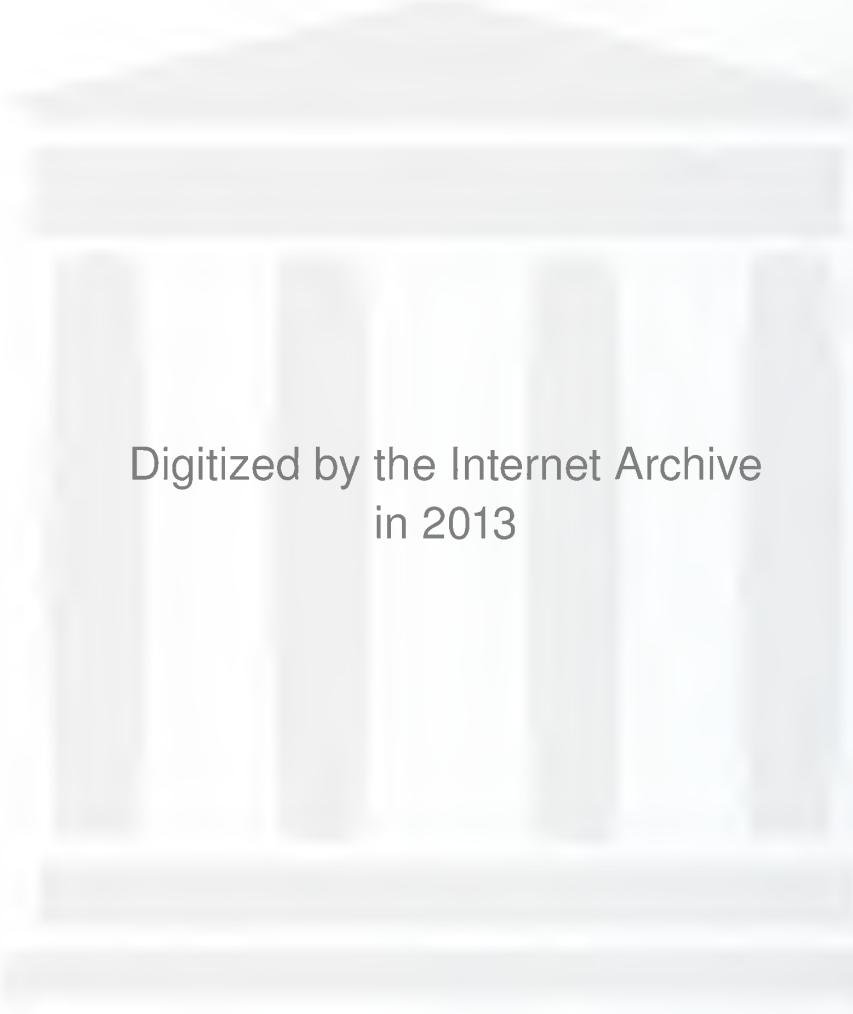


# Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

John Charles Fremont

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

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# A GUIDE TO THE OPENING OF THE WEST

AS EXPLORED AND EXPERIENCED BY

## JOHN CHARLES FREMONT

PORTRAYED BY

## RICHARD CHAMBERLAIN

IN

# DREAM WEST

APRIL 13, 14 AND 15, 1986  
A MINI-SERIES  
ON CBS®



# DREAM WEST

John Charles Fremont (1813-1890) was a surveyor, explorer, mapmaker, writer, politician, soldier, and entrepreneur who advanced confidently in the direction of his dreams. His passion was the West, and he pursued it throughout a life of action. His career was commensurate with his belief in America's destiny.

Fremont boldly explored the mountains, rivers, plains, and deserts of the West, covering in five expeditions more territory than any of his contemporaries. He reported to a hungry public what he saw, opening the continent with scientific maps for the wagon trains of pioneers who would follow. Through his published reports, he provided not only the path but a lure to America's expansive frontier.

If Fremont's early career marked the way for the westward movement, his later endeavors mirrored the conflicting social, political, and economic movements sweeping the country in the mid-nineteenth century. He was instrumental in the conquest of California, only to face a military court-martial for his decisions as governor there. He ran for President as the candidate of the newly formed Republican Party in 1856 and lost a close election as the nation catapulted toward the Civil War. He made a fortune during the California gold rush but saw it dwindle over the years through financial mismanagement. He sought to find a passage for new railroads to the Pacific and mounted a disastrous winter expedition in the Rockies. He





**“Life is action and passion. Therefore, it is required of a man that he should share in the action and passion of his time.”**

—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES, SR.

served the Union as the head of the Army of the West in Missouri but was recalled after he incurred the disfavor of President Abraham Lincoln. His life was characterized by contrasts and promise—much like the country he loved and helped to shape.

On April 13, 14 and 15, the CBS Television Network will present “Dream West,” a seven-hour mini-series based on David Nevin’s 1983 historical novel about the life and times of John Charles Fremont. The story opens in 1839 when Fremont is working as a surveyor on the frontier and continues through the major high points and low marks of his diverse career until 1887. The mini-series also dramatizes Fremont’s marriage to Jessie Benton, daughter of Senator Thomas Hart Benton, a powerful promoter of western expansion. A remarkable woman in her own right, Jessie proved to be her husband’s most ardent supporter and ultimately his partner in the pursuit of his dreams. (A summary of the story of “Dream West” appears on the companion Poster/Guide.)

Richard Chamberlain stars as John Charles Fremont, and Alice Krige is Jessie Benton Fremont. Special guest stars include F. Murray Abraham, Rene Enriquez, Ben Johnson, Jerry Orbach, G. D. Spradlin, Rip Torn, Fritz Weaver, and Anthony Zerbe. “Dream West” is a Sunn Classic Pictures production. Chuck McLain is executive producer, with Hunt Lowry as producer. Dick Lowry directed the script by Evan Hunter.



An expedition  
to map the West



**"Our country was opened up and built by people unwilling to accept the horizons they were offered; they had to push ever forward, trying to go beyond the limits presented to them. They gave themselves many excuses for going—to settle upon new land, to trap for fur, to dig for gold—but their real reason was their wish to extend themselves and to extend their horizons."**

LOUIS L'AMOUR, *Frontier*



Drawing of one of Fremont's campsites along the Oregon Trail

Rip Torn as trail guide Kit Carson



## DREAMS AND NEW HORIZONS

"America is a poem in our eyes: its ample geography dazzles the imagination," wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson in *Nature* (1840). For other Americans in the 1840s, however, the appeal of the West was more concrete. The vast frontier represented areas for settlements, an escape from poverty, expansion of commerce, and new boundaries for the nation. It fell to people like John Charles Fremont to make their dreams of extended horizons into plausible realities.

This important phase of Fremont's career is covered in Part I of "Dream West." The following questions and exercises focus on notable aspects of his accomplishments as explorer and map-maker.

### I. SCIENTIFIC MAPS

- During his 1838 and 1839 expeditions with Frenchman Joseph Nicolas Nicollet, Fremont learned the ropes of exploration. What special skills are needed to be a surveyor, topographer, geologist, and botanist? What techniques did Nicollet and Fremont use to create accurate and scientific descriptions of a geographical region?
- In "Dream West," Fremont meets an Ohio man who complains that the Oregon Trail does not exist. Later, Fremont explains to Senator Thomas Hart Benton the value of scientific maps of the West. How were Nicollet's and Fremont's maps different from other attempts to identify routes and important landmarks in the West?
- Fremont did not claim to be a "pathfinder" to the West. Rather, he charted routes which were already in use by trappers, mountainmen, fur traders, and other frontiersmen. What role did such men as Jim Bridger, Etienne Provost, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Jedediah Smith, and Joe Walker play in the West during the first half of the nineteenth century?
- Why were they soon a vanishing breed? Report on the expedition of Lewis and Clark in 1804-1806.

### II. THE EXPEDITIONS

- Richard Rhodes, a journalist, has observed: "Exploring an unexplored land is an act of creation. . . . By exploration the land is made human, fit for habitation, its alienage drained. . . . The explorer records its contours with an intense stylus of muscle and nerve. He walks calmly through terror—for the unknown object is terrifying—and alleviates it, and families

follow after to settle." What aspects of exploration do you think Fremont found most appealing? Research the substantive findings of his 1842 expedition to South Pass and his 1843-1844 expedition to Oregon and California. How would you paraphrase Fremont's dreams for the West and his view of his role?

- Kit Carson served as trail guide for Fremont's expeditions to map the Oregon Trail. Compare and contrast the characters of Carson and Fremont. What were each man's strengths and weaknesses? Why did they work well together? Report on the legendary career of Kit Carson after his expeditions with Fremont.
- Senator Benton and other enthusiasts of western expansion envisioned a wave of settlers moving to Oregon and California. What place did native Americans have in this future? How are Indians depicted in the mini-series? Point to specific instances in the story. Then research the treatment of the Indians during the pioneer period.

### III. THE REPORTS

- Fremont's maps showed the routes, but even more influential in popularizing the westward movement were the published reports about his expeditions. "The reports were lively, filled with human touches, even frontier gossip, and provided curious Americans with a wealth of miscellaneous information about the West. More important, the reports gave utilitarian information about terrain, campsites, water, vegetation, wildlife, and weather," note Donald Jackson and Mary Lee Spence, who have edited Fremont's reports and letters. What role did Jessie Benton Fremont play in the preparation of the reports? The marriage of Charles and Jessie Fremont was described by historian and biographer Allan Nevins as "one of the truest love stories in American history." What insights do you gain from the mini-series about Jessie's importance to Charles' career?
- Fremont's contemporary Henry David Thoreau found in the wilderness a source of vigor and inspiration: "From the forest and the wilderness come the tonics and the barks which brace

man," he wrote. Fremont's reports reveal his keen appreciation of the wilderness. Find examples of his love of nature in *The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont: Volume I, Travels from 1838-1844* edited by Jackson and Spence.

- Read other books from this period which celebrate the wilderness: Washington Irving's *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835), Francis Parkman, Jr.'s *The Oregon Trail* (1849), and Henry David Thoreau's *Walden: A Life in the Woods* (1854).

- "Is it not likely," Sherwood Anderson wrote in a letter to a friend in the 1920s, "that when the country was new and men were often alone in the fields and forest they got a sense of bigness outside themselves that has now in some way been lost?" What positive experiences have you had in the wilderness? Which of the wilderness places in "Dream West" would you have liked to visit in Fremont's times?

# DREAM WEST

Richard Chamberlain as John Charles Fremont on the summit of Fremont's Peak in the Rockies





**"I close the page because my path of life led out from among the grand and lovely features of nature, and its pure and wholesome air, into the poisoned atmosphere and jarring circumstances of conflict among men, made subtle and malignant by clashing interests."**

—JOHN CHARLES FREMONT, *Memoirs*



Alice Krig as Jessie Benton Fremont surrounded by well-wishers at the convention of the newly formed Republican Party

Fremont for President posters for the election of 1856



## JARRING CIRCUMSTANCES AND CLASHING INTERESTS

America in the nineteenth century was rocked by change—the vast emigration of pioneers to Oregon and California, conflicts between the states leading to the Civil War, and the emergence of a new entrepreneurial spirit in the West. John Charles Fremont, as he aptly observed in his *Memoirs*, which covers his life until 1847, was embroiled in the jarring circumstances and clashing interests of those times.

At the root of the events in Parts II and III of "Dream West" are some of the major motifs of this period of American history. The following discussion questions and suggested research topics are designed to help put these events and ideas into a historical context.

### I. MANIFEST DESTINY

The magical phrase "manifest destiny" was coined by John L. Sullivan, editor of *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, who saw it as America's mission to "smite unto death the tyranny of kings, hierarchs, and oligarchs, carry the glad tidings of peace and good will where myriads now endure an existence that is scarcely more enviable than the beasts of the fields." He concluded that it was America's destiny to be the "Great Nation of Futurity." Identify scenes in the mini-series

when the idea of manifest destiny is discussed. How was this concept evident in the policies of President James Polk?

- What was the nature of the dispute between the Americans and the British during the 1840s over Oregon? What was Senator Thomas Hart Benton's position on this issue? How was the dispute settled?

- What precipitated the Mexican War (1846-1848)? Why did Southerners support the war and Northern abolitionists oppose it? Report on the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which ended the war.

- What groups were struggling for control of California when Fremont arrived there in 1846? Research the key events of the Bear Flag Rebellion. To date, the exact nature of Fremont's assignment in California is disputed by historians. At the time, public opinion differed widely on the propriety of his actions there. Give your personal assessment of those events and Fremont's subsequent court-martial.

### II. THE SLAVERY ISSUE AND CIVIL WAR

- The acquisition of new territories in the mid-century raised to flash point the smoldering question of the extension of slavery. How did the western territories upset the sectional balance between slave and free states? What was the intention of the Compromise of 1850?

- Fremont rebuffs an offer from the Democratic Party to be their Presidential candidate in the election of 1856, saying he opposes the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. What did these acts specify?

- In the mini-series, Fremont states: "I don't think it's either noble or honorable to want to live like lords on the backs of other human beings." He accepts the nomination for the

# DREAM WEST

Presidency from the newly formed Republican Party. Research and report on the platform of the Republican Party in the 1856 election. What was the party's slogan? What do you think would have happened if Fremont had won the election?

- "The property, real and personal, of all persons in the state of Missouri who shall take up arms against the United States is declared to be confiscated to the public use and their slaves, if they have any, are hereby declared free men." This proclamation was issued by Fremont as Commander of the Department of the West for the Union Army in 1861, early in the Civil War. How do you explain President Abraham Lincoln's response to this action?

- Jessie Fremont wrote of herself: "I am like a deeply built ship. I drive best under a stormy wind." How do you evaluate her behavior during the scene when she confronts President Lincoln on the conduct of the war and the slavery issue? What does this scene reveal about Lincoln's policy during the Civil War?

### III. THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SPIRIT

- The traditional view of the westward movement in the nine-

teenth century focuses on the farmer settlers who crossed the plains in wagon trains. A case could also be made for the argument that the West was peopled by entrepreneurs seeking new enterprises and quick riches.

Fremont made a fortune from his Mariposa property in California when gold was discovered there, and he became involved in an ambitious transcontinental railroad project. Discuss the westward movement as an attempt to expand the marketplace.

- In the conclusion to his biography of Fremont, historian Allan Nevins writes: "Fremont if anything lived too much in the future. With him it meant a disproportion between his ardent imagination, and his mediocre grasp of practical means to achieve the goal he so vividly saw. . . . He was a man who dreamed dreams and saw visions." Respond to this evaluation of Fremont. In what senses was he a product of his times? How was he ahead of his times?

- Jessie Benton Fremont provided a final tribute to her husband shortly after his death in 1890; it is quoted below. Make a list of Fremont's accomplishments based upon your viewing of "Dream West" and further studies. Then write an essay on "The Legacy of John Charles Fremont."

Fremont (Richard Chamberlain), Jessie (Alice Krige), and Senator Thomas Hart Benton (Fritz Weaver) at Fremont's court-martial



**"Railroads followed the lines of his journeys—a nation followed his maps to their resting place—and cities have risen on the ashes of his lonely campfires."**

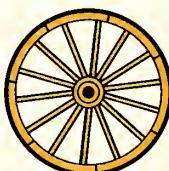
—JESSIE BENTON FREMONT



# DREAM WEST

This "Dream West" Guide to the Opening of the West was prepared by Cultural Information Service (CISystems, Inc.), an educational organization and publisher of resources for lifelong learners, including a series of TV Viewers' Guides, TV Alerts, and Poster/Guides. Directors: Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat. The development and distribution of this guide were made possible by CBS.

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# DREAM WEST



## POSTER/GUIDE

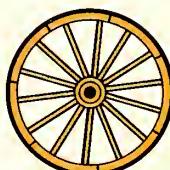
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# TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP

OF THE

## ROAD FROM MISSOURI TO OREGON

COMMENCING AT THE MOUTH OF THE KANSAS IN THE MISSOURI RIVER  
AND ENDING AT THE MOUTH OF THE WALLAH WALLAH IN THE COLUMBIA

In VII Sections

SECTION IV

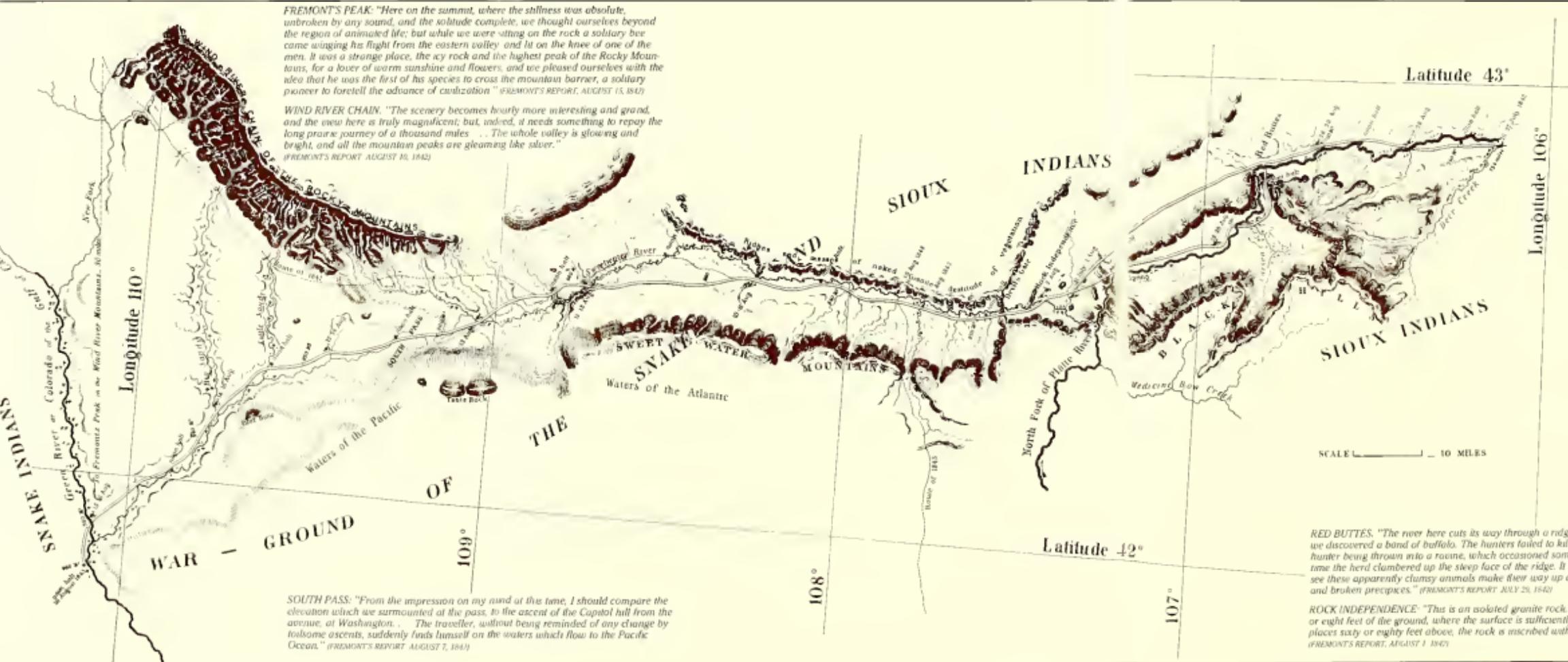
From the field notes and journal of Capt. J. C. Fremont,  
and from sketches and notes made on the ground by his assistant Charles Preuss

Compiled by Walter Verner 1896  
By order of the Secretary of the United States



J. C. Fremont

REMARKS 1 The figures on the road indicate the distance in miles from Westport Landing  
2 Water Abundant  
3 Grass is only to be found on the river banks, and there sometimes very scarce  
4 Fuel Cotton-wood and willow sufficient near the water courses and sage (artemisia) all over the country, often as high as the head - sometimes eight feet high, and several inches diameter at the stalk. Makes a quick fire  
5 Game At Sweetwater River buffalo appear for the first time and emigrants should provide themselves well with dried meat. West of that region nothing but a few deer and antelope are to be met with  
6 Indians Between the Red Buttes and Green River the war ground of the Indians particular attention should be paid to Indians and watch



# DREAMWEST

## PART I: SUNDAY, APRIL 13, 9-11 PM, ET

In 1839, John Charles Fremont (Richard Chamberlain) is assisting his mentor, Frenchman Papa Joe (Lee Bergeron), on an expedition to map the territory between the upper Mississippi and Missouri Rivers. Winter is fast approaching, and the other members of the expedition, led by Iraal guide Provost (Lee de Broux), complain that Papa Joe is needlessly prolonging the journey and is obviously in ill health. Over the older man's protests, Charles assumes command, and they head home.

In St. Louis, Charles and Papa Joe attend a party at the home of Senator Thomas Hart Benton (Fritz Weaver), a strong advocate of western expansion. Fremont, recalling a conversation with a man broken by the dream of reaching Oregon, explains the need for scientific maps of the West, which even then holds to the Pacific. That evening he also catches his first glimpse of the Senator's beautiful daughter, Jessie (Alice Krige), and tells Papa Joe that he intends to marry her.

Later, at a dinner party in Washington, D.C., Benton expounds on the nation's destiny in the West and proposes a new expedition to map the territory as far as South Pass on the Oregon Trail. When it becomes apparent that Papa Joe is too ill to attempt this work, the commission is offered to Charles.

His immediate attention, however, are focused on Jessie, and she returns his interest. The Senator believes she is too young for a romantic involvement and forbids them to see each other. They are forced to meet secretly at the home of Maria Crittenden (Gayle Hunnicutt). Deeply in love, they are soon married. Upon hearing this news, a furious Senator Benton disowns his daughter.

Preparing for the new expedition, Charles goes to Army headquarters to requisition a cannon from Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny (G. D. Spradlin). An authoritative man who disapproves of Fremont's ignorance of Army protocol, he reluctantly approves the request. Charles next hires Kit Carson (Rip Torn), a frontiersman familiar with the territory around South Pass, to be their guide. Later, Kearny attempts to have the expedition recalled, but Jessie learns of the plan and sends a message to Charles to leave immediately from Westport, Missouri.

On the prairie, Kit initiates Charles into the thrills of a buffalo hunt. Nights are spent taking star sightings with his assistant, Charles Preuss (Michael Ensign). Days are spent traversing the trail as young Kit (Martin Rabett) sketches plant life.

Outside Fort Laramie, the group meets Jim Bridger (Ben Johnson), a famous trapper, who warns them of trouble ahead with the Oglala Sioux Indians. Charles is determined to continue, and with Kit acting as interpreter, the explorers visit a Sioux camp to explain the peaceful purpose of their mission. After joining in a display of frontier skills, they win the respect of the Indians and are assured of safe passage.



The expedition continues over difficult terrain. Reaching the mountains, they are forced to abandon the cannon. Finally, they arrive at South Pass and further on, a summit they name Fremont's Peak. Anxious to return home quickly, Charles suggests that some of the party take to the river in an experimental rubber boat. They load the expedition records on board and head out into the rapids.

## PART II: MONDAY, APRIL 14, 9-11 PM, ET



After nearly losing all the records of the expedition when the boat overturns in the rapids, Charles returns home to Jessie, just in time for the birth of their daughter. He is awaiting the official return of the expedition but is soon discouraged by the lack. Jessie suggests he dictate his experiences, and she will write the report. This joint effort is widely read and praised.

Charles is approached by George Bancroft (John Harkins), Secretary of the Navy in the administration of President James Polk (Noble Willingham). They discuss the possibility of war with Mexico over Texas and the Navy's plan to seize the California ports if war begins. The President, Bancroft implies, would like Fremont's next expedition to end in California.

Although he will have no written orders, he could play an important role there. Jessie is hesitant about such a nebulous assignment,

but Charles accepts, believing the future lies in the West.

In December 1845, after crossing the Sierra Nevada mountain range, Charles, Kit, and a group of some 60 men arrive at Sutter's Fort in northern California. They are greeted by John Sutter (Jerry Orbach), a wealthy landowner and several American settlers. In Missouri, they are informed by General Castro (Rene Enriquez) that they should stay away from populated areas, an order which Charles ignores. A battle with a Mexican Army platoon is narrowly averted when the Mexicans turn back.

Later, while surveying in Oregon, Charles receives a message from President Polk War with Mexico is imminent, and Charles should return immediately to California. Arriving there, he finds that Castro

has threatened to drive the American settlers out of the area. With Fremont's encouragement, the settlers capture some horses confiscated by the Mexicans, seize the arsenal at



Sonoma, and announce the formation of the Republic of California. The men take over Sutter's Fort. Within a few months, the California Battalion has advanced to Los Angeles.

Charles meets with Navy Commodore Robert Stockton (Cameron Mitchell), who appoints him governor of the new civil government of California. He also advises Charles to send a full report to Washington. Kit agrees to carry the message, but en route is intercepted by General Kearny and forced to return. Kearny has his own orders to conquer California. He now demands that Charles step aside. Citing Stockton's orders, Charles refuses to comply.

Later, in Washington, D.C., Kit apprises Jessie of the situation in California. Together they go to see President Polk. Concerned that the public might regard the military campaigns in Texas and California as indirect attempts to extend slavery, Polk now denies ever sending Charles on anything other than a mapping expedition. In California, Colonel Mason (George McDaniel) assumes command. Kearny has Charles arrested on charges of mutiny and refusal to obey a superior officer. He is returned to Washington, D.C., to face a military court-martial.

men do not return as expected, Charles goes to find them, discovering that they may have resorted to cannibalism to avoid starvation. All are found dead during the attempted crossing.

Meanwhile, Jessie, who has suffered the loss of her second child, is on her way to California. She finds San Francisco gripped by gold rush fever and from Charles learns that some property he had previously purchased is rich in gold. A huge mining operation is begun on their ranch, the Mariposa. Still, Charles is interested in exploration and finances another expedition through the mountains, this

T he court-martial of John Charles Fremont is in progress as Charles questions General Kearny, he receives unexpected support from Senator Benton. Outraged at the unfair treatment of his son-in-law, Benton is finally reconciled to Jessie. Nonetheless, Charles is found guilty and dismissed from the Army. When President Polk reverses the sentence but not the verdict, Charles angrily resigns. Without government support, he decides to finance his next expedition privately.

In St. Louis, Fremont and Benton explain to a group of businessmen their plans to find a winter railroad route through the Rockies. The financing secured, Charles is undaunted even when he learns that Kit is not available to act as guide and that the coming winter looks particularly severe. From the start the expedition is difficult, and it is soon apparent that their guide, Bill Williams (Anthony Zerbe), does not know how to find the mountain passes. In the San Juan range near the Continental Divide, they are forced to

turn back.



In Washington, Jessie goes to President Lincoln to explain the situation in Missouri. He reveals his impatience with Fremont's leadership, particularly his recent issuance of a proclamation freeing the slaves of Confederate sympathizers in the state. Later, in Missouri, Fremont is given his command.

In 1857, the Fremonts, having lost all their money in unsuccessful railroad ventures, are living in a modest home on Staten Island. Since Charles is ill and should be taken to a milder climate, Jessie writes a series of newspaper articles about their adventures to earn travel to California. The journey is filled with memories and questions about what might have been. What is certain is that others have lived their dream and prospered.

## DREAMWEST

## PART III: TUESDAY, APRIL 15, 8-11 PM, ET

time successfully crossing to the Mormon settlement of Parowan. In New York, Charles finds that a political career is open to him. He is first approached by the Democrats to be their Presidential candidate in 1856. Unable to support their position on slavery, he eventually runs for the Presidency as the first candidate of the new Republican Party. They mount a vigorous campaign, but slurs about the candidate's illegitimate birth and rumors about cannibalism on the trail eventually take a toll. He loses the election by a thin margin.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Charles is appointed by President Abraham Lincoln (F. Murray Abraham) as Commander of the Army of the West. Missouri is an important border state, and Lincoln gives him the task of holding the line there. In St. Louis, Charles addresses the problem of Southern sympathizers and copes with setbacks in the field



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# DREAM WEST

## FREMONT'S MAPS: THE PIONEERS' ROAD ATLAS

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Americans in the mid-nineteenth century were ready and eager to move to the West, but in a very real sense, they did not know the way to get there. No one had made a scientific survey to map the routes across the prairies, the location of the good river fords, or the character of the mountain passes. There were no detailed written descriptions based on personal observations of the topography and hazards of the trail. John Charles Fremont's expeditions to South Pass in the Rocky Mountains in 1842 and to Oregon and California in 1843-1844 were organized to accomplish this task. The data collected on the trail was compiled and drawn into maps by Fremont and his assistant, German cartographer Charles Preuss.

The first map was published in 1843 and was followed in 1845 by the even more significant map of the entire length of the Oregon Trail. Together with Fremont's reports of the two expeditions, the maps created a "road atlas" for the great western emigration of the late 1840s and 1850s.

The map of the area around "South Pass" reproduced on this Poster/Guide is one section of a seven-part map compiled by Preuss in 1846. Because of its large scale, it could include more detail than the 1843 and 1845 maps, and Preuss added the locations of campsites and noon halts along the trail. Historian Donald Jackson explains that the map was "in sections so that the wagon traveler could handle one section with ease, even on a windy day."

A study of the map on the Poster reveals much about how Fremont and Preuss worked. Like the 1843 and 1845 maps, it is based on scientific observations. Using skills learned from his mentor, French scientist Joseph Nicolas Nicollet, Fremont was able to fix each location on the map according to longitude and latitude, in essence connecting the vast western territories to the rest of the known world. Every noon and evening on the trail, weather permitting,

Fremont made observations of the sun and measured the angles and distance between key stars. Later, these readings were compared to astronomical tables to determine longitude (position on the imaginary lines running north and south on the globe, measured in degrees east from Greenwich, England) and latitude (position in degrees north from the equator). Altitude was measured with a barometer.

Fremont and his assistants also systematically collected other data which would contribute to the accuracy and usefulness of the maps. Detailed sketches were made of the lay of the land and unusual geological formations. Plant specimens were gathered for later analysis by a botanist. Distances were logged, and daily notes were made about temperature and weather conditions. On the final maps, explains Jackson, "Fremont put down only those features of the land which he or members of his party had seen and charted. The result is a good deal of white paper—left to be filled in by his successors."

For his seven-section map, Preuss went one step further. He included "Remarks" which would be helpful to future travelers. Here was information on the availability of water, grass for the livestock, and game for food. There was advice about stocking supplies for the next legs of the journey and warnings about Indians. An example of these "Remarks" is reproduced on the Poster.

For the would-be emigrant to the West, Fremont's reports of his expeditions were as valuable as the maps. They contained day-by-day descriptions of what could be expected on the trail—not the dry observations of a scientist but the personal impressions of one who obviously possessed a love of adventure and boundless enthusiasm for the beauties of nature. Preuss chose to include some of these on his seven-section map. The Poster includes excerpts from these and other sections of the report of the 1842 expedition.

On a map of Wyoming, find the area bordered by longitudes 107° and 110° and by latitudes 42° and 43°. Compare this area to the map on the Poster. What is the significance of the notations "Waters of the Atlantic" and "Waters of the Pacific"?

2. Study some other Fremont maps, including (a) the map of the 1838 and 1839 Nicollet expeditions, (b) the map of the 1842 Fremont expedition to South Pass, (c) the map of the 1843-1844 Fremont expedition to Oregon and California, and (d) the seven-section map compiled by Charles Preuss. These maps are available in a special Map Portfolio published in conjunction with *The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont, Volume I: Travels from 1838-1844*, edited by Donald Jackson and Mary Lee Spence (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970).

3. Read Fremont's first-hand accounts of his travels. The reports of his two expeditions appear in *The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont, Volume I*. For Fremont's report covering the areas shown on the Poster, see pages 238-281. On July 26-27, 1842, the party crossed Deer Creek; they continued past Rock Independence, Devil's Gate, the Sweetwater River, and turned north to the Wind River Chain of the Rocky Mountains, reaching Fremont's Peak on August 15. The party then returned to the Platte River where, Fremont reports, they embarked in a rubber boat and nearly lost the expedition records when it capsized. In 1843, the expedition picked up the route of the previous year on August 10, west of Devil's Gate. The campsites noted by date from this point on the map until the Green River on August 16 are for the 1843 expedition. See *The Expeditions of John Charles Fremont, Volume I*, pages 465-468 for the corresponding section of Fremont's report.

# The Fictitious Frémont

## DREAM WEST

By David Nevin.  
639 pp. New York:  
G. P. Putnam's Sons. \$17.95.

By Marcus Cunliffe

**D**AVID NEVIN offers us a big fictionalized account of the life of John Charles Frémont (1813-90). Before his, there have been surprisingly few full-length portraits of Frémont — a piece of hero worship in 1856 (when Frémont was still in mid-career), and, in our time, a more substantial work, "Frémont: Pathfinder of the West," by Allan Nevins, and "Immortal Wife," Irving Stone's biographical novel about Jessie Benton Frémont. Why such neglect? The record is rich. Explorer, author, founding father of Californian independence from Mexico and statehood, son-in-law of Missouri's formidable Senator Thomas Hart (Old Bullion) Benton, owner of a mother-lode goldmine, Frémont is a conspicuous figure in the history of the American West. Indeed, his roller-coaster life coincides with much else in the history of the United States.

Consider, for instance, his 1847 court-martial for his part in the struggle for California's independence, his role as Presidential candidate of the new Republican Party in 1856, his controversial, frustrated activities as a Civil War general for the North, and his proud but impoverished old age, when he had lost his California domain and failed as a railroad promoter. How could such material fail to attract historians and novelists? Why mightn't they dream of a Pulitzer? Why not, further along the horizon, the vision of a major motion picture?

One probable deterrent is the complexity of the Georgia-born Frémont's life story. The geographical range of his five expeditions to explore the American West is hard to make clear. His role as map maker must be set in the context of Government-sponsored Western exploration, as has been done with erudite brio by Wil-

Marcus Cunliffe, University Professor at George Washington University, is the author of "Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America."



John Charles Frémont plants the flag atop the Rockies.

liam H. Goetzmann in "Army Exploration in the American West, 1803-1863." Frémont's military career is likewise a puzzle. He was commissioned directly into the Topographical Engineers, a tiny corps officered almost entirely by the cleverest graduates of the United States Military Academy. He believed West Pointers were plotting his downfall during the Mexican War and again during the Civil War. According to Senator Benton, Frémont's court-martial was a matter of elitist envy. "Frémont," Benton wrote, "the explorer of California and its preserver to the United States, was brought home a prisoner to be tried for an offence, of which the penalty was death, to expiate the offence of having entered the army without passing through the gate of the Military Academy."

Frémont's story is also complicated by ambiguities and by partisan differences of interpretation. Allan Nevins felt that Frémont's deeds had been inflated by his admirers. He believed the "Pathfinder of the West" was more accurately a "Pathmarker," mapping terrain already traversed by mountain men and explorers,

not to mention Indians. Among detractors, it was not only those in the military who regarded Frémont as a man on the make, trading on his Benton connections and winning acclaim for published reports that had been elevated from bare statement into artistry by his talented wife. Contemporaries and historians both describe him as "impetuous" and "impulsive" — a man who suffered not from indecisiveness but from an opposite tendency to leap to premature conclusions. Mr. Goetzmann, while praising Frémont's cartography, suggests that the man himself "disintegrates on close historical scrutiny." In line with this point of view would be Frémont's occasional recklessness as an expedition leader and the lack of financial acumen that cost him his gold field.

Frémont's latest chronicler, David Nevin, is a Western buff who has taken considerable pains to master the intricacies of his story. Especially in the first half of the book, he acknowledges the flaws in his hero's character. But the Frémonts, husband and wife, are to him ultimately above reproach. Their critics, including President Abraham Lincoln, are faulted as ill-informed when they are not downright malevolent. Such admiration imparts a warm glow to the book and gives it a kind of credibility. Small flaws Mr. Nevin will admit, contradictions not. He declines, perhaps sensibly, to psychologize over the impact on Frémont's personality of his having been born out of wedlock. I wish, though, he had been more willing to speculate on, say, whether Frémont's exceptional good looks made him vain, or how ambitious he was (Did he not love being civil governor of California in 1846-47?), or why after five years of marriage he had still not revealed his exact age to Jessie (he was 11 years older than she).

"Dream West" is pretty much the novel its title promises — a romanticized narrative, accurate enough where evidence exists, especially good in its descriptions of Western landscapes, readable though perhaps overlong, less ingenious than the semifictional, semihistorical exercises of a Gore Vidal, less profound than a Marguerite Yourcenar. Some of the dialogue is, to my taste, unauthentic and vulgar, and there is a final question: Why a novel about Frémont instead of a biography? Could it be that he is *au fond* a fictitious character? □

FREMONT, JOHN CHARLES

DRAWER LOC

CONTEMPORARIES

